

plora algunos de estos aspectos, la magnitud y complejidad del tema harían probablemente imposibles enfoques exhaustivos o más abarcadores, y constituye una nueva y bienvenida fuente de información sobre una intersección (lengua e identidad) que ha sido, es y será el centro de apasionantes debates.

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CREACIÓN

Adelaida García Morales. *El testamento de Regina*. Madrid, Debate, 2001, 157 pp.

At thirty-two years old, and four years after finishing studies in psychiatry, Susana answers a newspaper advertisement in which a wealthy, seventy-eight year old woman is desirous of hiring such a trained professional to live with her in order to appease her older brother and an only son, given their concerns about —what they would like to call— her advanced senile dementia (more specifically, they are anxious about the large sums of money she freely gives to people in need). As the job interview proceeds, Susana becomes convinced that Regina, her attractive, well-kempt interviewer, is quite capable of caring for herself and in no need of round-the-clock supervision. She also senses that an instantaneous bond has been formed with the septuagenarian, being herself impressed with the mild-mannered vulnerability framing Regina's openness and lack of pretension. Without ever asking, or even suspecting, how well paid she will be, the young psychiatrist accepts the position and keeps it until Regina's death one year later. Once settled into her daily routine, and trained as she has been in the detection of mental disorders, Susana recognizes certain obvious peculiarities in Regina's friends and family members, namely, a life-long maid named Antonia, and the previously mentioned eighty year old brother, Ramón, and his two children, Eugenia and Pedro, as well as various other individuals who have a vested interest in their —potential— benefactor's Andalusian-based real estate empire. Given such key components as money and family dysfunction, it is no surprise that divorce and untimely deaths and murder, chemical dependency, infidelity, abuse, blackmail, neuroses, greed, guilt, fear, and obsession form the coordinates along which this novel develops as readers attempt to determine who will be the heirs to Regina's estate.

When asked about the matter-of-fact narration and similar lackluster literary sophistication of *El testamento*, García Morales' straightforward response attests to her clearly stated goal of wanting to tell a good story «como si fuera una escritora anglosajona de finales del XIX»¹. The story's

¹ Miguel Mora, «Adelaida García Morales: escritora. 'Estamos al borde de la catástrofe', *El País (digital)* (31 enero 2001), Grupo Prisma, 2002.

predictable theme of greed and psychological aberrations aside, it is the author's signature psychic narrative spaces which succeed in transforming the soap opera-like events into a well-spun tale which is eloquently delivered by its narrator-psychiatrist as she keeps faithful vigil over her elderly companion's body the night before it is to be laid to rest. The same undisturbed grace which sets the tone for the entire narrative discourse also shrouds the bizarre manner of occurrence of the deaths and other tragedies which unfold as Susana recreates through memory the character around whom everything revolves: «Regina murió silenciosamente, mientras se entretenía haciendo un solitario con una baraja de cartas españolas. Yo regresaba de hacer unas compras y la descubrí sentada a la mesa camilla de la sala en que solía pasar gran parte de su tiempo» (5). Avoided are dangerous pitfalls into a graphic sensationalism of such events as, for example, Susana's childhood encounter with a child molester one day on her way home from school, or Regina's adulterous love affair with a young Republican soldier in the early years of her marriage shortly after Spain's Civil War, or her son Bernardo's failed marriage, to mention only a few. García Morales confers the narrative fabric of her novel with dignity and decorum by intelligently weaving into it the necessary threads of suspense which motivate us to pay close attention to the muted retelling of the dastardly events of Regina's life as they in turn are recounted to Susana by other character-narrators right up until the very end of the novel (and after Regina has died). And so, while such traditional devices as, for example, mimetic dialogue and flashback are found with more regularity here, *El testamento* nevertheless retains its essential quality of a narration which transgresses its own chronological boundaries and overflows into the timelessness of that particular kind of fiction of which García Morales is a masterful artisan: «la atmósfera tan singular que existía en la vivienda... era tan intemporal como su propiedad, era como si no perteneciese a ninguna ciudad. Me sentía inmersa en una forma de vida en la que lo cotidiano no tenía cabida» (86).

Because Susana is not a practitioner of psychoanalysis, long conversations with Regina about her life are not plentiful. They are replaced instead by an insightful narration of what has led to her ever-present sense of doom, originating as it does in the drowning death of her younger brother Luis when she was six years old, itself the key event in her childhood which cast an unrelenting shadow of guilt over her and shaped her adult life around its tragic axis. As might be expected, the grief she now experiences as a result of her son's recent, unexpected death, intersects constantly with the loss of her brother, thereby confusing the psychological spheres in which she moves in the comfortable life she has fashioned for herself as a result of the vast wealth she has accumulated over the years since her husband's death. On an excursion to the main house in Carmona, Susana and Regina discover (early in the novel) the murdered bodies of Bernardo and his fiancée, hence establishing from the

onset the story's poetics of incredulity: «[l]o atroz y lo normal pueden existir simultáneamente» (51). Such violence, which has all the makings of a murder mystery, also sets the tone for an unrelenting subtext of parapsychological —narrative— brushes with the spirits of Regina's deceased loved ones of which Susana is very much aware as she observes her elderly companion play chess: «[m]e pareció que Regina deseaba hacer frente común conmigo... y colocarme en el mismo escaque del gran tablero de ajedrez en el que... empezaba a jugar con sus familiares. Sin embargo, de ningún modo me sentí manipulada» (31).

Susana seems to understand instinctively the nature of her emblematic role in Regina's complex world, and for that reason limits the application of her medical skills to prescribing sleeping and anti-depressant medications for her. More than anything else, she is content to be an integral part of Regina's life, while over time closing herself off from the outside world and refusing to spend much time with her parents and others, such as her colleague and former boyfriend Alberto, who expresses to her his growing apprehension about what strikes him as Susana's bizarre fascination with what has clearly become for her much more than a good job. This —type of— narrative tension is fueled by the inescapable presence of Regina's emotionally disturbed brother Ramón, who, in turn, is convinced that the young psychiatrist is solely interested in inching him and his two children out of what he hopes will be their fair share of Regina's wealth after she dies. Countless other inheritance-related conflicts run counter to Regina's philanthropic generosity and growing acceptance of Ramón's mental instability, and thus serve to enhance the bothersome question that is posed by the novel's title and which, albeit with unexpected resolve, is answered at the reading of Regina's will: «[s]obre sus familiares no decía absolutamente nada, ni siquiera los mencionaba» (155) ... leaving the readers of this review to read firsthand *El testamento de Regina* in order to arrive at the true manner of resolution given this novel by its author.

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Luis Mateo Díez. *Las palabras de la vida*. Madrid, Temas de Hoy, 2000, 221 pp.

La palabra es un ente diminuto que sin embargo posee el poder de un gigante. La palabra transforma en pensamientos los sentimientos instantáneos y con ello nos hace humanos. La palabra detiene el tiempo que nos vigila y acecha, rescata el recuerdo devolviéndole todo su poder y materia. La palabra multiplica el disfrute de la imagen y la hace revivir. La palabra, en fin, avala nuestro paso por el mundo, nuestra identidad, ya que mediante su materia verbal nos convierte en seres sociales que